



***From “Wetland Program Development Grants (WPDGs) Case Studies”  
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**Oklahoma:** *Developing an outreach program that educates resources managers, landowners, teachers, students and the general public about the ecology, function and value of common wetland types in Oklahoma*

**Introduction**

The Oklahoma Office of the Secretary of the Environment (OSE) (formerly the Oklahoma Department of Pollution Control) and Oklahoma Conservation Commission (OCC), play integral roles in managing and protecting Oklahoma’s natural resources. These two offices work in a collaborative capacity, along with several other state and federal agencies, to “conserve, enhance and restore the quantity, quality and biological diversity of all wetlands in the state.”

From the inception of the WPDG program, Oklahoma has been very proactive in developing its wetland program. A review of their WPDG projects demonstrates how they have utilized the grants to facilitate the continual progression of their state wetland program. Oklahoma OSE and OCC initially used grant funds to develop Oklahoma’s Comprehensive Wetland Conservation Plan. This plan addresses a reoccurring problem in many state wetland programs, stated best in the Plan itself, “To date, wetlands management can be characterized as fragmented, confusing and often inconsistent.” Through this project, Oklahoma was able to formulate a focused strategy and direction then identify specific objectives for their wetland program. The objectives, outlined below, were addressed in several subsequent projects awarded under the WPDG program.

**Wetland Program Objectives Identified by Oklahoma’s Comprehensive Wetland Conservation Plan:**

- 1) Promote the coordination of wetlands management;
- 2) Establish net-gain/no-net-loss policies for state-owned lands and state-funded projects;
- 3) Integrate wetlands with other related resource issues;
- 4) Characterize wetlands more completely, identify critical functions and types of Oklahoma wetlands;
- 5) Develop a classification system and water quality standard to protect wetlands;
- 6) Provide technical assistance and incentives for landowners implementing “wetland-friendly” management strategies;
- 7) Develop information/education programs on Oklahoma’s wetlands;
- 8) Identify and prioritize wetland areas of special concern;
- 9) Identify wetland sites for restoration/enhancement and potential funding sources for those efforts;
- 10) Integrate wetlands conservation with floodplain management and incorporate more wetland greenbelt/riparian areas;
- 11) Establish a comprehensive statewide mapping program; and

- 12) Develop techniques for protecting, enhancing and constructing wetlands for pollutant control and/or mitigation.

While strides have been made within several of the objectives above, this case study will focus on outreach efforts that highlight the success of Oklahoma's wetland program.

### **WPDG Activity**

Oklahoma's Comprehensive Wetlands Conservation Plan emphasizes coordination of wetlands information through public outreach programs at the state agency level and environmental education programs for Oklahoma's public schools and institutions of higher learning. *The Oklahoma Wetlands Reference Guide* was developed, using WPDG funds, to help a variety of users identify and understand the ecology of the most common natural wetland types found in Oklahoma. The intent of this publication was to provide natural resource professionals, educators and private landowners with a guide that can be used to evaluate changes in similar wetland types, measured against a common standard. The reference guide, published in 2000, has been distributed statewide and serves a common tool for professionals and educators in the recognition of soil properties, vegetation and hydrologic indicators used in identifying wetlands in Oklahoma.

Oklahoma also created a simplified publication describing wetlands in the state. *Oklahoma Wetlands—Wet, Wild and Wonderful* is a teacher's brochure that introduces Oklahoma's wetlands in a way that is easy to understand, interesting and interactive. Through hands-on projects, students learn how to recognize wetlands, understand their value and take responsibility for their protection. The projects in the brochure can easily be adapted to include a class, family or community. The American Library Association's Government Roundtable selected the brochure, published in 2000, as one of three "Notable Publications" for the state of Oklahoma in 2002.



Educators wading through Oklahoma wetlands during a two-week tour, part of a program to familiarize the public with the state's wetland resources. Photo courtesy of Oklahoma Conservation Commission.

### **Current Work and Future Plans**

The development of a comprehensive wetlands monitoring and assessment program is essential to support many of the activities in the state's wetland strategy. The Oklahoma Surface Water Monitoring Strategy has recognized probabilistic monitoring as a high priority item. As part of the statewide strategy, the wetlands monitoring strategy incorporates a design with three main objectives: 1) track wetlands gains and losses; 2) track status and trends for wetlands quality; and 3) determine beneficial use attainability. OCC will address the first objective of the strategy with a WPDG awarded in FY05.

Development of a probabilistic monitoring design will facilitate the estimation of wetlands gains and losses. The state will be able to use digital wetlands and related data to make scientifically defensible estimates of wetlands gains/losses. The second step in the monitoring strategy will be to use wetlands monitoring techniques currently under development with the probabilistic design. This will allow estimates of status and trends to be made, not only for wetland acreage, but also for wetlands quality in the state. Ultimately, the third step in the monitoring strategy, determination of beneficial use attainability, will be implemented. Progress under the latter objectives of the monitoring strategy is contingent on future funding.

Please visit Oklahoma the Oklahoma Conservation Commission wetland website ([http://www.okcc.state.ok.us/Wetlands/wetlands\\_home.htm](http://www.okcc.state.ok.us/Wetlands/wetlands_home.htm)) for more information about their role in protecting wetlands and links to the documents highlighted in this case study.

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